

## *Is the media finally tuning in to the climate crisis?*

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### **Body**

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Whether it is the horrific Amazon fires or the catastrophic hurricanes, it is plain to see that our planet's climate is in crisis. But given that, why is so much media coverage - particularly in the United States - reluctant to clearly acknowledge this?

We hear endlessly of the personal drama of these disasters - gripping stories of lives lost, heroes discovered and the courage of first responders. And we are told constantly by political leaders of the need for prayer.

But mostly we hear only reluctant reference to the root causes, and the wider scientific and ideological issues.

Why is this?

Perhaps we can learn something in the fable of the frog brought to boil.

If you drop a frog into boiling water, according to the fable, it will immediately jump out. But if you put the frog into cool water and slowly heat the water up, the frog won't notice and will eventually be cooked to death.

Drum roll please as we remember what this fable is supposed to teach us - that people often don't see change happening until it is too late.

That is all fine and good except the fable is a myth. Scientists say that frogs would actually notice that the water is getting hotter and jump out.

We, on the other hand, seem to be staying put.

But thankfully, just as the water is about to boil, the rest of us may be learning something from the frog and getting out.

Under pressure from increasing numbers of people alarmed at how the climate issue is being treated, many news organizations are changing their coverage.

The most striking evidence was on Wednesday when CNN broke all rules of U.S. television and broadcast a marathon seven-hour series of town halls titled the "Climate Crisis" with the 10 leading Democratic presidential candidates.

It was an unprecedented focus on the climate issue in an American broadcast universe that has until now dodged and ducked serious exploration of the connection between climate change and the corporate and political forces to blame.

## Is the media finally tuning in to the climate crisis?

The CNN series - which will be matched this month by the MSNBC news channel - introduced issues that have been given short shrift in previous coverage of extreme weather disasters.

These included the risks of fracking, nuclear power and fossil fuel, and the corrupting power that oil and gas companies have over U.S. and other political leaders. Until now, these have been alien issues in most U.S. living rooms.

These media projects are only happening because many Americans are increasingly appalled at how their country's elites are mishandling the greatest challenge to the planet in this century.

But recent academic studies by the University of California, University of Kansas and the Hanoi University of Science and Technology reveal three tendencies of media coverage that need to be changed.

The first is that the U.S. media, in particular, provides too much weight to people who are skeptical of climate change for ideological reasons, ignoring the science, which in turn provides them legitimacy they haven't earned.

The second - coming from a media study of 45 countries - suggests that coverage in the industrialized world is overwhelmingly framed as a domestic political issue with little sense of urgency.

And the third tendency is for the media to concentrate on the so-called individual "sacrifices" - in terms of personal consumption, habits and costs - that might need to happen in order to respond to the climate crisis.

The challenge is enormous but there are increasing signs that news organizations are responding.

More than 170 news outlets worldwide - with a combined audience of hundreds of millions of people - are taking part in an ambitious project, titled Covering Climate Now. They are committed to publishing or broadcasting a week's series of climate coverage leading up to the UN Climate Action Summit in New York on Sept. 23.

International participants include the Guardian, Columbia Journalism Review and the Nation. In Canada, the Toronto Star, Maclean's and TVO are participating.

Yes, as our fabled frog would attest, now that it is time for all of us to get out of the water.

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